



How do we develop civic-minded graduates?

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Keywords: Student-faculty interactions, civic-mindedness, pedagogy, student development, quantitative

Conference Track: Higher education student outcomes

Format: Poster presentation

Summary

Higher education institutions are being asked to produce students who possess civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. First, we need to better understand how one becomes civic-minded. This poster presentation will share results from a recent study that assessed the extent to which certain factors contribute to student development of civic-mindedness.

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which certain factors (service learning and reflection, dialogue across perceived difference, prior experiences, and student-faculty interactions) contribute to student development of civic-mindedness. Particular attention was given to student-faculty interactions due to the overwhelming evidence that student-faculty interactions are vital to student success (see references).

There is no widely accepted scholarly definition of civic engagement, although many attempts have been made to rectify the different definitions (Bringle, Hatcher, & Holland, 2007; Finley, 2011; Howard, 2011). Often, the following terms are used interchangeably: civic engagement, democratic participation, citizenship, and community engagement. Despite all of these terms, the overall research on faculty behaviors and institutional characteristics demonstrates an impact on student engagement and learning, which reinforces the importance of conveying the campus mission (Astin 1993; Chickering 1969; and Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Conceptualizing civic learning is difficult because we lack agreement of what it means to be a good citizen who is effectively engaged in democratic society even though scholars have attempted to find consensus around this (Cunningham, 2006; Howard, 2001; Saltmarsh, 2005). Generally speaking, civic learning consists of knowledge, skills, and dispositions and is the basis for much of the research on civic engagement activities designed to produce civic learning.

This study is important because we need to graduate people who are civic-minded. By increasing our understanding of how to develop civic-mindedness through identifying contributing factors, we can better understand how faculty and mentoring plays a role in student development of civic-mindedness. This will then allow us to be more intentional and strategic in faculty development efforts and program design.

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